DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 076 269 RC 006 950

AUTHOR Morris, Robert
TITLE Politics of Local Control: Ramah Navajo Community Forms a School.
PUB DATE 27 Mar 73
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society, San Antonio, Texas, 25-27 March 1973

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *American Indians; Community Schools; *Curriculum Design; Educational Programs; Program Content; *School Community Relationship; *School District Autonomy; *Self Directed Groups
IDENTIFIERS *Ramah Navajo High School

ABSTRACT

For more than 100 years the Native Americans of the U.S. have been dominated economically, socially, educationally, and culturally by the larger society in which they live. The U.S. government has set policies, primarily through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), without consulting Native Americans. The Ramah Navajo Community experienced relatively greater Federal and local domination because of their isolation from the larger Navajo reservation. In February, 1970, the Ramah Navajo Community voted 44-0 to create a school board. The 44 represented the intent of the entire Navajo community to assume responsibility for control of the already existing school. On March 25-27 the school board received support from Representatives and Senators and eventually from the BIA. The curriculum stressed the bicultural setting. Many of the traditional subjects taught in public schools were included with adaptations, i.e., English was classified as a foreign language. Physical education stressed continuing leisure activities rather than pure calisthenics. The curriculum attempted to combine Navajo culture, international humanistic values, and competence in individually chosen fields. (FF)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 076269

POLITICS OF LOCAL CONTROL: NAVAJO COMMUNITY FORMS A SCHOOL*

Dr. Robert Norris
The Pennsylvania State University

RECEIVED JUN 11 1973 NMSU E.R.I.C.

Introduction

Throughout the world, many former and present colonial societies lack control of their schools. The colonial powers continue to determine, through accrediting mechanism, the dominant European educational leadership, or the staying power of pre-independence superstructures, part or all of the education forms in these former colonial areas. It is this writer's opinion that the particular client or dominated cultures involved view such education forms with varying degrees of awe but, at the same time, feel little or no obligation or commitment to them. The thesis developed here claims that indigenous or local control is essential for these countries to be free educationally from the colonialist's domination of their lives and institutions. If a group or nation have no voice in their own affairs, they are likely to respond with disinterest or apathy--escape mechanisms--or are ripe for rebellion. In the case of Native Americans, the former situation obtained in that Native Americans have become disinterested in the irrelevant institution of education imposed upon them over the past one hundred years, the consequences of which will be discussed below.

For more than one hundred years the Native Americans of the United States have been to a very large extent dominated economically, socially, educationally, and culturally by the larger society in which they live.

*Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society, San Antonio, Texas, 25-27 March 1973

ED 076269

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

The United States government has dominated and unilaterally set policies without consultation with the Native Americans. The Bureau of Indian Affairs under the Department of the Interior has been instrumental in this domination. Although policies within the Bureau of Indian Affairs have shifted with each presidential administration, the theme and effect throughout has been to deculturize Native American Indians.

With respect to education, the Bureau of Indian Affairs has taken five or six year old children from their parents and home with the view of removing them from "uncivilized influences" and eventually totally assimilating them into the "civilized mainstream" of the U.S. society. As a result, many Native Americans have come to feel defeated. They have been caught in extreme cultural clashes which have further resulted in a sense of felt hopelessness. Education, as structured and administered by the "foreign" power has caused many Native Americans to resign themselves to a kind of outside domination by the Bureau and other government agencies in most aspects to their life.

Not all knowledgeable Native Americans presently feel compelled by a great sense of mission to solve the problems of very poor health, insecure identities, chronic and extreme unemployment, persistent discrimination, inferior and negative education, and lack of socio-political self-determination. This is probably, in part, due to the lack of public support for solving such problems. Many Native Americans are hoping that the extreme domination suggested above may, in the not too distant future, come to an end. The cause for this hope lies in a recently adopted piece of legislation, Public Law 92-318 which was passed July, 1972. Native Americans helped formulate this piece of legislation to get more direct aid to local nations. Authorizations of monies exist; but appropriation of monies do not always support noble aims. Local control for Native Americans require outside resources as their economies

are not sufficiently developed.

Of more than 800,000 Native American Indians living in the United States, more than 150,000 are Navajo Indians. The Navajo have a culture, today, which includes sheperds as well as scientists. It has adopted and modified many modern technologies for its own use. Success of Navajo college students has come through the strength of the Navajo culture rather than whatever improvement may have taken place in the Bureau of Indian Affairs' educational system.

Many Native American tribes, as with small nations throughout the world, wish to control their own destinies. Control has various levels. Control for many colonial nations means national independence under a separate government. For the Native American, it means independence at local levels no matter what the area such as control of the local economy and the local school. The Ramah Navajo High School is a case in point.

Ramah Navajo High School

Ramah, New Mexico is an isolated mormon village in the high plateau country fifty miles south and east of Gallup, New Mexico. The Ramah Navajo Community is located thirteen miles southeast of Ramah and approximately seventy miles south of the huge Navajo reservation in Utah, Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona. The Ramah Navajo number approximately 1,500.

The Ramah Navajo Community until recently has experienced relatively greater federal and local domination because of their isolation from the larger Navajo Reservation. In fact their high school age children had been attending nineteen different private, public, and mission schools from Oklahoma to California. Employment help and other services were limited as well.

In February 1970, the Ramah Navajo Community voted 44-0 to create a school board. The forty-four represented the feeling of the entire population as was determined in subsequent meetings. On February 10, 1970, the school board received its corporate seal from the state of New Mexico. This action marks the first time in a hundred years that an Indian community created its own school board and decided to assume full responsibility for control of a school which did exist at the time. The community has gained a measure of pride in their accomplishment. The Bureau of Indian Affairs, the U.S. Office of Education and other Federal agencies while respecting such an effort has done so with some reservation.

Sam Martinez, a member of the elected school board who while lacking a formal education, but nevertheless speaks four languages, expressed the opinion, "Our children go to boarding schools now. Before, they went to some high school, but it closed down. Now children learn to drink and smoke. My boy has even been to jail. That's why we want a school out there (at Ramah). We want to teach kids ourselves--English, how to learn, and how to put a saddle on a horse. We want our children to write English too."

From March 25-27, 1970 the school board went to Washington, D.C., got the support of some representatives and senators and, eventually, made the Bureau of Indian Affairs promise to help establish a high school at Ramah. Bertha Larenzon, then vice-president of the board, told the federal officials,". . . . We want our children back home. We won't leave this building until we get a definite commitment of support from the BIA." On April 21, 1970 the school board and the BIA signed a contract and formally transferred education of Native Navajo children back to their own parents and their own culture.

The community, students, and the faculty had numerous meetings to determine curriculum and goals. The curriculum tended to stress the bicultural setting. Many of the traditional U.S. subjects as taught in public schools were included, but with adaptations. English, for instance was classified as a foreign language. Physical education stressed life long leisure activities rather than pure calisthenics. New courses included business oriented courses, Navajo culture including philosophy of life, Navajo language, and other courses for community development.

Curriculum Formation Procedures

The following are two sample interviews, summaries of curriculum direction, and a brief description of the selection of courses:

I. TRANSCRIBED PARENT INTERVIEWS

A. Parent Interview - Faye Pino

Q. This new school has been given to us. The Navajos have a chance to say something about the school. What is the school and what should be the goals of the school?

A. I want a good school. I want the students to finish school without fooling around. As it is, many fool around and drop out before they know anything. I want them to learn to work.

Q. Do you like the idea of the local school?

A. Yes.

Q. In your opinion, what was the matter with shipping kids off to the reservation schools?

A. They did as they pleased and learned we know not what. They didn't complete whatever they started. It is good that an individual start in the grade schools and finish through high school. Even though some finished high school, they want to be left entirely alone.

Q. What about these graduates as compared to those who haven't gone to any school?

A. It's all up to each individual. If the graduate can remember what his people are like, then he can become alive and help his people, in food, work, wood, and so on.

Q. Then you think one should solve or be helped to solve his problems, and then work on a career?

A. No, some of this depends on the individual's own ideas. After all, the individual is going to live his own life. He has to be aware of the problems that exist and live according to his own thinking.

Q. How can one develop his own thinking?

A. I'm not sure, probably by listening to older people and then obeying them.

Q. But what if he is grown up already?

A. Yes, that's what I meant the first time. They must try for themselves to learn first and then finish school. After that they must help their people and then help those who are like themselves to plan to help each other. Right now they must not talk back (since they are in the training stage), but help out as much as they can.

Q. We hope that this school will be the very best. That's why we are asking these hard questions. Now, what about things that should be taught related to work?

A. On that, I suppose, secretarial work, art, whatever else they and you want. I don't know, whatever else is possible. Many schools offer technical and vocational training in Albuquerque and elsewhere, these would be good starting points. As it is I'm not that familiar with the school. I'm speaking from just what I have heard and learned. I like the school being back with us.

Q. You must be frank on what you think because it is not just back with you, but it is your school.

A. Then what about all these Anglo counselors. Many do not seem to approve of them as I hear the people talk. We would rather have Navajo college students instead of having to be forced to hire and pay these people from the east.

Q. Yes, this happens if the people don't talk. If you don't say these things and the school fails, the school will be taken away from you again.

A. Yes, I heard these things from those I know. They say that the Bilagaanaa girls and boys are the counselors leading kids to drink, dance, and so forth. My mother thinks that if Navajo young leaders (college kids) did the counseling then these things wouldn't happen in the summer school project. This is what we think.

Q. Thank you for these thoughts; starting a High School is not easy. It is on your shoulders as the members of the Ramah Community.

B. Parent Interview - Mrs. Nancy Beaver, a grandmother

Q. What do you think about the re-opening of your school?

A. I like it very much.

Q. You really do?

A. Yes.

Q. Washington used to plan the school. Now it is up to people like you to plan it. Now it is in our (Navajo) hands. It is rather scary, isn't it?

A. Yes, it really is. What do you mean, plan?

Q. The total school--everything. Like teachers, classes, and so on.

A. Yes, I think teachers ought to be the very best teachers. Teaching the "good" values. Control of students in a structured way. Teaching of life and the future work of the high school students. Home building, so on, whatever the high school student wants to do and be.

Q. What "good" values do you mean?

A. Listen to parents, home life, the way to live.

Q. What about the Navajo traditional values?

A. We've left these behind. We now are learning the Christian view of life. This new way ought to be looked at. We can't get our kids to listen to us.

Q. What do you mean, children don't listen to us?

A. When we teach or speak about life, when we talk about work, and everything else I talk about to my oldest daughters. They can't even communicate with their own children. As the children's grandmother I'm not listened to as before.

Q. How can we teach these children then, by just talking?

A. Yes, like counselors.

Q. Do you want them to go far off to school?

A. No, I know what they are allowed to do there. They do things we don't approve. My daughters don't want their children to go to far off schools. On the other hand, that school may not be much different than this one we're starting (in teaching methods). Behavior will not change radically. However, I like them to be here rather than there.

Q. You only mentioned home building as relevant; what else should be in the school?

A. All jobs they want and need near home and away from home.

Q. Do they know how to prepare food when they come home from school?

A. No, they can't even do that. We cook for them. They just stand around. Even chopping wood and hauling water. They depend on us and we're wearing out. They only listen to music on the radio and it accompanies them every where. I ask why and they never answer.

Q. What food do they like?

A. Anything that's on hand. I really don't know what they like or dislike.

Q. Don't they say anything?

A. Never. Never talk to us.

Q. No work, no talk. But why do you think it's this way? Is it the school's fault?

A. I don't know, some of it is, but some is ours and theirs. One of ours went to school, dropped out and just sits around. They don't communicate--why?

Q. The school is yours and should be different from the schooling of the past. What do you think of the new school? Tell what you like and don't like so far?

A. I really like it. I think that with this school the kids will start to progress in the right direction (listen, work and learn).

Q. Any other thing? Do they object when they do speak?

A. Yes, they would rather argue and cuss then to make intelligent conversation. We are very concerned with this. They can't get along with us (their parents). They seem useless to us.

Q. Do they tell about what they do at school this summer?

A. No, they don't. They mumble something about work only.

Q. Then they say nothing about the school itself?

A. That's right. That is why we want to send them to you for work and time for talk.

Q. What do you think about the re-opening of your school?

A. Yes, I like it very much.

II. SUMMARY OF COURSES AND PROBLEMS

Taken from the Parent Interviews (Based on an initial 30 interviews). These are given as samples and without elaboration.

Courses suggested by the parents:

Rug Weaving
Agriculture
Silversmithing
Leather Craft
Preparation of foods and uses
Home Improvement
Mechanics
Banking
Nursing
Medicine
Hospital Work
Livestock
Navajo Culture
Old Traditions and customs
Weaving
Navajo Language
Recreation
Business
Accounting
Secretarial Skills
Legal Services
Arts and Crafts (Anglo and Navajo)
College Preparation
Belt Making
Decision Making
P.E.
Bead Works
Leather Craving
Painting
Athletics
Vocational Training
Philosophy of Life
U.S. and World History
Sewing
Working with hands
Typing
Carpentry
Welding
Auto Mechanics
Teacher training
Interpreters

Problems suggested by parents:

Drinking (liquor)
Bad behavior
Kids can't think for themselves
Lack of responsibility
Lost sense of direction
Drop-outs
Transportation
Counselor to understand student's problems
Housing
Food
Clothing

Suggestions for improvements made by parents:

Variety in curriculum
Make classes a bit tougher or harder
Experimental school should be quite contrary to those of present high schools
Careers to benefit Navajo people
Teach our youth in Navajo and English
Not to use their education as a weapon against their parents
Learn trade to help parents
Consider discussions as a means of solving problems
Allow parents to speak at assemblies

III. NEGOTIATED CURRICULUM

From the above summaries the views of the parents and community representatives became known. The students also had a similar opportunity. The teachers had a lessor role in such interviews.

The director of curriculum planning scheduled a negotiation session for the selected parents, student leaders, and teachers who wished to attend.

There is no room nor time to describe the final list of courses. The final list looked like a college catalog.

The actual negotiation process was very interesting also. Some students opposed studying the Navajo language, but were quickly proven and shown the value of the course by the parents. Teachers limited themselves by thinking of content for course as embracing only certain bodies of knowledge.

The following schedule of courses and requirements was the final product of three days of meetings:

Curriculum Schedule 7th and 8th Grades

I. Math and Sciences
   A. General Math - required
   B. Business Math - elective
   C. Algebra - open to interested 7th and 8th graders
   D. General Science - required
   E. Chemistry - elective for 8th graders
   F. Biology - elective for 8th graders
   G. Ecology - elective for 8th graders

II. Lifetime Recreational and Health Skills
- A. Family Health - required for 7th and 8th graders
- B. Recreational Skills - all are elective for 7th and 8th graders

III. Language
- A. Structure - required for 7th and 8th graders
- B. Journalism - elective for 7th and 8th graders
- C. Reading
  - 1. Speed Reading - elective 7th and 8th graders
  - 2. Remedial - required for those who need it
- D. Navajo - required for 7th and 8th grade Navajos
  elective for 7th and 8th grade Bilagaanaa
- E. Spanish - elective for 7th and 8th graders.

IV. Skills
- A. Arts and Crafts - elective for 7th and 8th graders
- B. Creative Art - elective for 7th and 8th graders
- C. Photography - elective for 7th and 8th graders
- D. Shop - elective for 7th and 8th graders
- E. Agriculture - elective for 7th and 8th graders (1/2 year course)
- F. Electronics - elective for 7th and 8th graders
- G. Homemaking Skills - required for 7th and 8th grade boys and girls

V. Social Studies
- A. Consumer Education - elective for 7th and 8th graders Level I
- B. American Indian History - elective 7th and 8th graders
- C. U.S. History - elective
- D. Navajo Culture - elective - Level I
- E. Government - elective
- F. Tribal Studies - elective
- G. Psychology - open to interested 7th and 8th graders
- H. Anthropology and Sociology - elective
- I. Alcohol and Drugs - elective
- J. Job Opportunities - elective

VI. Lifetime Music Skills - elective

VII. Counseling - elective

Curriculum Schedule 9th to 12th grades

I. Math and Science
- A. General Math - elective for 9-12 grades
- B. Business Math - elective
- C. Algebra - elective I and II
- D. Geometry - elective 10-12 grades
- E. College Math - elective 11-12 grades
- F. General Science - elective 9-10 grades
- G. Physics - elective 10-12 grades
- H. Chemistry - elective
- I. Biology - elective 9-12th I and II

J. Geology - elective
K. Astronomy - elective 11-12th grades
L. Ecology - elective
M. Meteorology - elective

II. Business Education
A. Typing I and II - elective
B. Shorthand - elective
C. Bookkeeping - elective

III. Lifetime Recreational and Health Skills
A. Health - required this year 9-12th grades
B. Recreational Skills - electives all of them

IV. Language
A. Structure - required
B. Journalism - elective
C. Reading
1. Speed Reading - elective
2. Remedial Reading - required for those who need it
D. Creative Writing - elective
(12th grade Bilagaanaa may take this in place of Structure if desired)
E. Navajo - elective Levels I and II
F. Spanish - elective
G. German - elective 10-12th grades

V. Skills
A. Nursing - elective only Level II taught
B. Arts and Crafts - elective
C. Creative Art - elective
D. Photography - elective
E. Driver's Education - elective for 16 years or older
F. Shop - elective
G. Agriculture - elective for 10th and thru 12th grades
1/2 year for 9th grade class
H. Electronics - elective

VI. Social Studies
A. Consumer Education - elective Level II 9-12th grades
B. American Indian History - elective
C. U.S. History - elective
D. World History and Geography - elective
E. Navajo Culture - elective Level II
F. Current Problems - elective
G. Government - elective
H. Tribal Studies - elective
I. Psychology - elective
J. Philosophy - elective
K. Anthropology and Sociology - elective
L. Law - elective Level I and II
M. Alcohol and Drugs - elective

N. Economics (small business procedure) - elective
O. Job Opportunities - elective Level I and II

VII. Lifetime Music Skills - elective

VIII. Counseling - elective

REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION FROM 8TH GRADE

1. 2 years General Math
2. 2 years General Science
3. 1 year Family Health (including First Aid, Sex Education, Health)
4. 2 years English
5. 2 years Navajo except for Bilagaanaa students who can take this as an elective
6. 1 year Homemaking Skills both boys and girls

REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION FROM 12TH GRADE

1. Family Health and P.E. - 1/2 Units
2. English - 4 Units
3. Math - 1 Unit (does not include General Math)
4. Social Studies - 2 Units
5. Laboratory Science - 1 Unit
6. Ecology - 1 Unit
7. Drugs and Alcohol - 1 Unit

Approximately 14-15 Units between the 10 and 12th grades are required for Graduation. It's optional if the student wishes to meet the above requirements. In other words the standards that are set up are designed for those who wish to go on to college. Others who wish to graduate from this high school and have not completed the requirements should be approved by:

1. teachers
2. some students
3. Parents

This group will review the course taken by each individual who wished to graduate for some purpose other than college entrance. The amount of flexibility given to these individuals should be between 1 to 3 Units of the above requirements. In such cases prior approval of the program is needed.

The actual method of procedure would have been to have professional educators determine the curriculum as the particular state required. For such a diverse and different culture as the Navajo, the above procedure makes education have some relevance to the particular values of the Navajo.

For instance, a course in meteorology as initially proposed by the Navajo people was to compare the method of rainmaking by the Zuni, the Hopi, the Navajo, and the white people. The course never became a reality because the white teachers could not cope with such a course content!

Significance

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the Ramah Navajo High School is not the unique curriculum, the elected school board, the liberal orientation of the staff, nor bringing the children closer to home, but the fact that the Navajo people are beginning to assume control of a foreign social institution for their own cultural survival. Were it not for this, the social institution would still be foreign, alien, and irrelevant to the Navajo people.

The curriculum formation was unique in that the parents, community representatives, and the students had a strong voice. The professional educators attempted to meet the expectations. The curriculum attempted to combine Navajo, international humanistic values, and competence in individually chosen fields whether technical and vocational or purely academic.

The elected school board was very strong. It dealt with details which principals in other schools would have left to teachers. The board was confident they could lead in the field of education. The board succeeded in getting state accreditation despite obstacles and objectives from the local mormons, and the state superintendent of schools.

The staff of the new school had some shortcomings but on the whole listened to the school board. Most teachers shouldered a great deal of work to operationalize the total school from pounding nails to writing lesson plans.

The students have gained a cohesion and loyality which did not exist before. They feel a part of a community from which they had previously been alienated. Presumably some will help to build the local community on stronger social, economic, and other bases than they would have done otherwise.

Despite these benefits, the fact that the Navajo people feel a concern in education which they had lost in much more significant. The concern is genuine and will continue even if the federal government and the state do not give the kinds of economic support that is urgently needed. Such a deep concern will not long tolerate a mediocre education system.

Consequences

Several Native American Indian communities have followed the example of Ramah Navajo High School as a direct consequence. Benefits to the Ramah Navajo Community have already become apparent. Navajo people who had no opportunity for employment are being employed. Uneducated and inexperienced Navajo people are teaching courses for which they are uniquely qualified according to their culture. Adults are communicating with the young which they never had much of an opportunity to do before. Students are proud of themselves and their own people.

In 1864 the Navajo people were captured and herded like cattle to Bosque Redondo, New Mexico as prisoners of American soldiers. This action nearly destroyed the Navajo people and their culture. Now, the Navajo have several locally controlled schools including the Navajo Community College at Chinle, Arizona.

Bertha Lorenzo summarizes the aspiration of the Navajo in the following statement:

"Throughout our history of Ramah, New Mexico, we have always lacked formal education. That is why we have always depended upon others to help us survive. We have lacked the means to become truly self-sufficient and strong. Education provides that strength which even today, we do not have in Ramah."

"The community of Ramah elected us to start something for their children, something which will stop this unending cycle of despair. We want to end it now, for the sake of our children and generations to come. This is why we want to see this school begin and grow--to help bring about the kind of education which will develop strong leaders of our people--Navajos with a strong sense of pride in their Navajo ways, Navajos who can more confidently in all worlds, Navajos who will become leaders in all fields of endeavor. That is why we work now to see this school become a reality."

Conclusion

In the United States there are approximately 500 different Native American nations in the United States. Each of these nations are as different from one another as the Germans are from the French or any other European peoples. Each nation wants to control its rate of cultural change. Not all have the same opportunity nor motivation as have the Navajo.

Professional educators have been accustomed to determining philosophy and to structure schools for Native Americans, Blacks, Chicanos, and whatever "general American" is. Parents, community leaders, and students have been alienated and sometimes excluded in a rush to develop professionalism. The professional has forgotten that certain and different cultures change at different rates. Thus, minority and "majority" communities have been left out of planning efforts for cultural change. Minority cultures, Native

Americans in particular, resent professionals from alien cultures determining cultural directions for them.

Cultures change at different roles. The professional educator sees himself or herself as a control or a prime mover in process of change and does not consult affected communities to assess perceived need for change, rate of change, methods of implementing change or, perhaps most important whether change is to take place or not.

What exactly does "mediator" mean? If it means pluralness and heterogenerty that the education can serve as mediator--especially if he/she knows little of any of these cultures--is not mediator but "binding arbitration" which is not arbitration only arbitrary.